

Review of The Memory of the Earth: Lithuanian Legends

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This past year has seen the publication of The Memory of the Earth: Lithuanian Legends, prepared by B. Kerbelytė and published by The Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore. This is a book which has the unique intent of stimulating ecological and historical preservation efforts through folk narratives, specifically legends. The target readership is folklorists and others interested in folklore and in conservation.

There are three parts to this book: a foreword, the texts themselves, numbering 490, and explanatory notes. Most of the texts were selected from the manuscript archive of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore. The Institute has a repository of over 4000 legend texts and the cataloguer of this body of narrative was B. Kerbelytė, the compiler of the book under review. The Memory of the Earth includes some texts from printed sources. Already published texts were used in those few cases where the narratives were unique. The presentation of all materials is faithful to the original and thus, in most cases, the texts are transcriptions of recordings from authentic folk narrators.

The element common to all of the texts is that they deal with nature. The narratives selected for inclusion are grouped into eleven chapters and organized by geographical region: "In the neighborhood of Vilnius," "The districts of Kaunas," "Paparčiai, Trakai, and Kernavė," "The earth of žemaičiai," "Central Lithuania," "Eastern Lithuania," "From Raigardas to Simnas," "Panemunė," "The Land of lietuvininkai," "Sūduva," and "From Lithuania as a Whole." The legends themselves tell about living stones which were brought by mythological beings. There are stories of lakes which move and rivers which compete with one another. Some narratives tell about mansions, churches, and treasures inside of mountains. Photographs of the geological and archeological monuments in question accompany the texts and provide useful and interesting illustrations. They were taken from the Archeology Section of the Institute of the History of Lithuania, from the Visual and Sound Archives of Lithuania, the Center for Cultural Heritage, and the Center for Documentation and prepared for publication by the archeologist V. Vaitkevičius. The third part of the book, the explanatory material, gives background information on each of the texts and lists the sources of all of the photographs. A table of the abbreviations used is provided and information on the cataloguing of Lithuanian texts and on the relationships between them is included. The Memory of the Earth is an attractive and aesthetically pleasing publication with useful information for everyone.